

War Is No Solution

By SANFORD J. BENJAMIN

SINCE September 1, 1939, the minds of the American people have been shifted from domestic to foreign problems. Whether by design or genuine fear, the Administration has emphasized that the danger to our security lies in the outcome of the German-British struggle rather than in the rectitude of our internal economy. It is a strife, we are told, between freedom and totalitarianism; and since this nation and England practice similar systems of government, we owe it to our own self-interest as well as common heritage to aid the British. For if the Nazi machine triumphs militarily, *ipso facto*, it will triumph ideologically and engulf the United States.

Some Georgeists adhere to the above line of reasoning even though they admit in calmer moments that basically this war is one for control of the raw materials of the world, principally that large portion which has been held by the British for centuries and used to further their own special interests—in trade, in finance, in the formation of opportunistic alliances. Despite this admission of British sins—the rock-bottom of landlordism—the tyranny of the Nazi jackboot is looked upon as more menacing, even to the extent that after Adolf Hitler is “dethroned,” the world will be in a position to “win the peace.”

Just what sort of “peace” may be envisioned by students of “Progress and Poverty” requires no exposition here; but when Mr. Roosevelt states certain post-war aims, they should be carefully scrutinized, because as President he will undoubtedly play a leading rôle when the shooting ceases. Said Mr. Roosevelt: “We will not accept a Hitler dominated world. And we will not accept a world like the post-war world of the Nineteen Twenties in which the seeds of Hitlerism can again be planted, and allowed to grow. We will accept only a world consecrated to freedom of speech and expression—freedom of every person to worship God in his own way—freedom from want—and freedom from terror.”

These are beautiful thoughts but they can only be realized in a Georgeist society—and Mr. Roosevelt is not a Georgeist. We must ask ourselves, then, whether the President is playing politics, indulging in sweeping generalities, as is the way of the politician when he wishes to enlist the support of the unthinking masses; for the people are confused, unable to ascertain the fallacies in general statements. They do not know the basic fundamentals of an economy which would guarantee these freedoms. The wretched conditions we are living under are being played upon to give the people hope—the only form of escapism left—that after the war the “peace will be won.”

Let us look at the “peace” after the war, in the words of Foreign Secretary Eden: “Irrespective of the nature of the

political settlement, Continental Europe will end this war starved and bankrupt of all foods and raw materials which she was accustomed to obtain from the rest of the world.” What are the British planning to do about such a situation? Again I quote, this time from Ambassador Halifax, in a recent speech before the Pilgrim Society:

“In many respects the world must be treated in future as a single whole. Since the last war we have seen an increasing difficulty in securing the distribution of the world’s abundance both within and across national frontiers, with adverse effects upon the worker’s standard of living everywhere. We had hoped to see the vision of plenty banishing the specter of scarcity; but what in fact we have seen has been the failure of men to exchange with their fellow-men the abundant products of both farm and factory. When therefore victory has been won, it must be our aim to promote the common interest in the greatest possible interchange of goods and services. Problems involving common needs can only be solved by common action.

“We see the urgent need for economic cooperation and we are ready to take part in plans to promote it on a world-wide scale. Our aim will be prosperity justly shared. Even now we are making plans to remedy the impoverishment which must follow in the train of war. We are arranging to establish stocks of food and raw materials which can be released as soon as we can be sure that they will be used for this work of healing and not for our destruction.”

The significant parts of these quotations are: (1) Europe will be impoverished; (2) hindrances to trade both within and across frontiers must be abolished; (3) prosperity must be “justly shared”; (4) the admission that food and raw materials—the earth—must be made available to all nations. Point one is self-evident. The second, it seems to me, was put in as a joker, for on the next day when Ambassador Halifax held a press conference he was asked specifically whether Britain would scrap the system of empire preferential trade agreements, signed at Ottawa in 1932, allowing the British Commonwealth to entrench itself into an economic nationalism. “I wouldn’t at all be taken as saying that,” the Ambassador replied quickly, adding more slowly, “The nations of the British Commonwealth are every year growing more and more into one unity, and while they would all wish to make the maximum contribution they can to the economic life of the world, they will be frightfully jealous of anything that weakens their unity.” Does this suggest free trade? Hardly. Can prosperity be “justly shared” under such circumstances? Perhaps this is Lord Halifax’s view of prosperity—which would leave the landed estates intact in England, where even now a wild orgy of specula-

tion is being enacted in the form of buying up the bombed sites.

It is in point four, however, wherein we glean the crux of the entire program. Lord Halifax admits that food and raw materials must be made accessible to Europe but—and let the reader note this well—these raw materials will be doled out for rehabilitation *only*; they will be still controlled by the same clique who possesses them now. In other words, the very essence of a stabilized economy, of improved living conditions, of those four freedoms Mr. Roosevelt espouses, will be lost somewhere in newspaper files, never to be mentioned again except during future wars as necessary wartime rhetoric to gain the endorsement of a gullible public.

Nor can America's future economic security be gained by the enactment of such a program. Mr. Roosevelt says that the seeds of Hitlerism were planted during the Nineteen Twenties; yet Lord Halifax's post-war program *are* the seeds of Hitlerism. For the future salvation of the world will not be fulfilled in policing the seven seas by a joint armada of Anglo-American warships, nor the enforcement of certain political tenets of government, because as Henry George wisely pointed out:

"Political liberty, when the equal right to land is denied, becomes, as population increases and invention goes on, merely the liberty to compete for employment at starvation wages. This is the truth that we have ignored. And so there come beggars in our streets and tramps on our roads; and poverty enslaves men whom we boast are political sovereigns; and want breeds ignorance that our schools cannot enlighten; and citizens vote as their masters dictate; and the demagogue usurps the part of the statesman; and gold weighs in the scales of justice; and in high places sit those who do not pay to civic virtue even the compliment of hypocrisy; and the pillars of the republic that we thought so strong already bend under an increasing strain."

These words applied to Germany on January 30, 1933, when Adolf Hitler assumed the chancellorship.

The internal condition of America is not dissimilar. On August 13, 1938, the National Emergency Council drew up this picture of the political freedom of the South: "The South has piled its tax burden on the backs of those least able to pay, in the form of sales taxes. (The poll tax keeps the poorer citizens from voting in eight Southern States; thus they have no effective means of protesting against sales taxes.) In every Southern State but one 59 per cent of the revenue is raised by sales taxes." Is not this the most flagrant example of taxation without representation? And the economic freedom of the South is this: "The pattern of Southern tenancy was set at the end of the war between the States, which left thousands of former slave owners with plenty of land but no capital or labor to work it. Hundreds of thousands of former slaves and im-

poverished whites were willing to work but had no land. The result was the crop-sharing system, under which the land was worked by men who paid for the privilege (*sic!*) with a share of their harvest." If this is not enough for the reader, let him digest the concluding remark of the report: "Northern producers and distributors are losing profits and Northern workers are losing work because the South cannot afford to buy their goods." Is this picture compatible with Mr. Roosevelt's four freedoms? Indeed, with each passing year, we are losing the little freedom we have left because of the ever-tightening grip of governmental restrictions—the only method with which this Administration has cared to deal with our internal chaos. Moreover, if war comes, the march toward centralization will be turned into a gallop, for war these days is total war, which means a planned economy from the grocery store to the battlefield.

The tax burden to support this war will not end with the last shot. We pay now more than one billion dollars a year in interest on the federal debt. Increase that amount five times and ask yourself what sort of economy we will have. Add at least two billion more for the *upkeep* of the gigantic army, navy and air force after completion—again I ask, what sort of economy will this leave us?

If poverty and discontentment increases under those circumstances, will our armed forces guard us from internal decay? Let us draw a lesson from France, a nation which once raised the banner of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. They had their armed forces, but behind the steel forts, deep-rooted, gnawed the cancer of defeat—discontentment.

Identical seeds are being nourished *here*—because of our failure to have security—because we *worship* freedom but fail to *practice* it. Will we survive under these conditions?

The road to war is not the road to freedom. It will only accelerate us down the path of retrogression—and therefore is not the solution for America to follow.

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[We can indeed agree with Mr. Benjamin that "war is no solution" to our economic problems. The real solution, we know, is the single tax and free trade. We cannot agree, however, that a British victory in the present struggle would be just as disastrous to the world and to our country as a Nazi victory. Even in our "calmer moments" we do not construe this war as nothing but a struggle for raw materials; nor do we find anything inherently "Georgeist" in such a view. We are aware of all the weaknesses in the British and American economic structure which Mr. Benjamin points out and indicts. But we are not therefore ready to accept a Nazi victory as making no difference. Georgeists are offering a reform which can only be realized in a society that has made some strides toward freedom. This implies that we have faith in the basic framework of our democratic system—and that this system is worth preserving and defending. For a more complete expression of our views in this matter, see "Comment and Reflection" in this issue and in the issue for November-December, 1940.—Ed.]